

Board of Education Budget Workshop

February 24, 2015, 6:00 PM – 8:00 PM

Dr. Alfred B. Tychsen Administration Building

I. CALL TO ORDER

Board Members Present: Franca Biales, Sheila Daniels, Ava Hart, Cheryl McClellan, Ed McKeon, Gene Nocera, Linda Szyrkowicz, and Mitchell Wynn

Board Members Absent: Vincent Loffredo

Common Council Members Present: David Bauer, Gerald Daley, Grady Faulkner, Sebastian Giuliano, Deborah Kleckowski, and Sandra Russo Driska

City Hall Staff Present: Mayoral Chief of Staff Joseph Samolis

Others Present: Superintendent of Schools Dr. Patricia Charles, Associate Superintendent Enza Macri, Director of Pupil Personnel & Special Education Ann Perzan, Special Education Supervisor Amy Clarke, Director of District Operations Marco Gaylord, Director of Adult Education Jim Misenti, Director of Technology Michael Skott, Director of Vocational Agriculture Rebecca Isaacson, Director of Facilities Judy Yoder, Parent Leadership Coordinator Donna Marino, Program Budget Analyst Cheryl Walcott, Grants Consultant Elizabeth Nocera, Middletown High School Principal Colleen Weiner, Director of Athletics/Student Activities/Physical Education and Health Elisha De Jesus, WWMS Principal Robert Conroy, Keigwin School Principal Silvia Mayo Molina, Bielefield School Principal Jeff Fournier, Farm Hill School Principal Richard Henderson, Lawrence School Principal Melissa Barbuto, Macdonough Principal Jon Romeo, Moody School Principal Yolande Eldridge, Spencer School Principal Suzanne Zahner, Wesley School Principal Tom Cannata, Middletown Federation of Teachers Union President Janice Pawlak, and no visitors.

Chair Nocera called the Workshop to order at 6:05 PM.

MOTION: Move to accept the Agenda passed with a motion by Ms. Daniels and a second by Ms. Biales – unanimous vote.

Board Chair Gene Nocera welcomed those gathered and outlined the format of this evening's workshop.

II. DISCUSSION OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION 2015 – 2016 BUDGET BY BOARD OF EDUCATION MEMBERS AND COMMON COUNCIL MEMBERS

Dr. Charles presented an overview through a PowerPoint presentation with assistance from Associate Superintendent Enza Macri, Middletown High School Principal Colleen Weiner, WWMS Principal Rob Conroy, Macdonough Elementary School Principal Jon Romeo, and Director of Technology Mike Skott.

Dr. Charles discussed the Board of Education's 2015 – 2016 Budget of \$80,715,746 (additional funding of \$4,509,832). This is a 5.92% increase above the 2014 – 2015 Budget of \$76,205,914. She noted the majority of the Board of Education's budget is in the areas of salaries and employee benefits. She shared new information since the Board adopted the budget which includes: reduction in insurance \$1,929,245; Sodexo contract reduction \$10,272; ACES Tuition no increase \$10,110; Excess Cost Grant Adjustment to 2013-2014 school year +\$200,000. Dr. Charles noted that the Board of Education has a total staff of 964; student population of 4,740; 321 students in the Adult Education program; 180 ESL students; 687 Special Education students; 59 teachers hired in the 2014 – 2015 school year; 150 positions recruited yearly (not including Local 466); and mental health services were provided to 1,010 students. Dr. Charles provided information on DRG G Central Office students per administrator ratios. There was a discussion on the needs of Woodrow Wilson Middle School and Facilities; the Fine Arts program and budget; and Governor Malloy's budget cuts.

Dr. Charles responded to Councilman Daley's question with regard to the size of our district's administrative staff in comparison to other districts. In response to a question from Councilwoman Kleckowski for information about the kind of administrative services other districts offer that Middletown does not, Dr. Macri responded that many Middletown administrators are doing more than one job. Councilman Giuliano inquired as to the district's commitment to WWMS in light of the school's age, need for attention and lack of renovation in more than 22 years. Dr. Charles responded that WWMS needs a complete renovation and noted that the Board of Education is requesting funds to conduct the initial district study to determine how these renovations should occur, and said WWMS is first on the list for renovations. Board member Szykowitz asked for a security update for WWMS. Director of Facilities Judy Yoder provided a synopsis of the progress stating that the contract is about to be signed by the Mayor. Board member McKeon noted the dedication of Macdonough teachers who have conducted summer school for free for six years. Board member Daniels said all elementary schools need the same additional resources as Macdonough School receives through its relationship with Wesleyan University. With respect to losing teachers to other school districts, Councilman Daley stated that he did not think the proportion of lost teachers was unusual, and that "other industries" experienced the same kind of losses. Dr. Charles and Dr. Macri explained that losing teachers after five to eight years is problematic because they had been trained and acclimated to district expectations and that the investment in training and district knowledge is lost when they leave. Dr. Macri added that it was totally appropriate for teachers to receive more professional development opportunities than our district currently offers.

Councilman Daley excused himself and asked a few questions as he had to leave to attend another meeting at 7:30 PM. He asked if the reduction in insurance was reflected in Dr. Charles' budget request. Dr. Charles responded that it was included. He asked why there was such a large increase in the Transportation line, and if the contract had gone out for bid. Dr. Charles responded that the budget was awarded without a bid by the Board during the tenure of the interim superintendent who preceded her. She added that going out to bid would not necessarily reduce costs since she had talked with other superintendents who had recently gone out to bid and seen large increases. Board member Szykowitz stated that she has informed the Board that the bus contract must go out to bid. Councilman Daley stated that he could support everything that goes into the classroom, but was reluctant to support expenditures that did not directly affect students.

During the technology discussion, Councilman Giuliano indicated that technology support was not much better at City Hall, noting that the effective use of technology by staff was still not at its best.

After the presentation on Special Education, Councilman Giuliano acknowledged that an alternative center would have to be front-end funded to attract students back. Councilwoman Russo Driska asked how many Special Education students were serviced and Director of Pupil Service and Special Education provided the figures. Councilman Giuliano indicated the problem with front-end funding of the alternative program is that it would increase the required minimum funding the city must provide each year, and that the City would not realize the savings. Board member McKeon told Councilman Giuliano that the additional funding might actually push Board of Education funding into a range where it should be after eight years of flat funding.

Toward the end of the workshop Councilman Giuliano indicated that it is important to work together. Board member Daniels spoke of the City advocating with legislators, and noted the importance of collaboration and cooperation and cited the example of shared resources with regard to snow removal could save many dollars, to which Councilwomen Kleckowski and Russo Driska agreed. Mayoral Chief of Staff Samolis, Councilwomen Kleckowski and Russo Driska agreed that working together was

important, but that without being able to see how the Board of Education was spending money on a line item basis, it was hard to provide additional funding, as the Council and Mayor have to explain funding to all residents. Mayoral Chief of Staff Samolis noted the collaboration with legal and finance which took two years to come to an agreement, added that investing in our schools will attract new residents; and said a capital investment should be put into the school district. Board member Daniels said that cooperation meant that all parties had to look at every dollar spent and saved as “our” funds; not exclusively City funds or Board of Education funds. Board member McKeon said that refusing additional funding because the Council and Mayor could not scrutinize line-item spending was an excuse, and that the Board of Education, and the administration, had been completely open about the budget and spending for the past three years, and had, in fact, begged for the appropriate software to report spending, and that the software had still not been provided.

Board Chair Gene Nocera thanked all participants for attending and encouraged both bodies to work together regarding this difficult financial situation.

III. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Move to adjourn at 8:30 PM passed with a motion by Mr. McKeon and a second by Ms. Szyrkowicz – unanimous vote.

Respectfully Submitted,

Ed McKeon
Secretary

EM/mp